

DRAMATICS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

BECAUSE high school dramatics is of such importance to those interested in the development of the high school pupil, I have made a study of the high schools in Virginia to find out what they are doing in dramatics. An editor of a collection of plays for classroom study says, "Properly directed work in dramatics develops the pupil's power of self expression through its training in the co-ordination of mind and body."¹ He believes that it makes for social efficiency; that it quickens the powers of visualization; and that it tends to deepen the student's knowledge of human nature.

The desire to imitate is an inborn instinct in man, and by means of a school play or plays we have an excellent opportunity to guide the pupil's initiative powers. But we must be sure that the pupil is getting the very best plays to work on and live with, because if they are good plays he will live with them. "If he receives nothing else from it, repeated rehearsals of eloquent, beautiful or racy language must leave at least a subconscious impression."² We find that the most significant value of dramatization is the attainment of the power to express the best that is in us. Many children, when they reach the high school age, become so self conscious that they really suffer. Dramatic guidance of the best sort, more than any other agency, helps to prevent this miserable self-consciousness and awkwardness, and aids in self-expression. To really make plays bring out the best that is in the pupils and create the interest that should be there before the play can be properly presented, they should be given for pleasure and artistic effects, not as a money making performance. The interest should be in the play itself and not in the crowd which will come or the twenty-five or fifty cents which will be taken in. When this idea is instilled into every dramatic coach in the high schools we can expect better plays and more appreciation from the pupils. And incidentally, the public will profit by them as

well as be entertained. It is because of my interest in these facts that I have made a survey of dramatics in the high schools of Virginia.

In an effort to find out just what the high schools of Virginia have been doing in the last three years, I formulated a questionnaire made up of the following questions:

I. What plays were given in your school during the last three years; were they under the auspices of the school or of some group of students?

1919-20

1920-21

1921-22

By what organization?

II. Check below the word which tells under whose direction the plays are produced:

Principal

English Teacher

Interested Citizen

Teacher of

Dramatic Coach

III. How many years experience has the director had in this work?

IV. Is the director paid anything from the proceeds of the play, or is he paid by the school?

V. What is your customary price of admission?

VI. What disposition do you make of the funds other than to meet expenses of production?

VII. Is work in dramatics carried on by a dramatic club?

VIII. If so, when was it organized?

IX. How many members has it?

X. Of what value is the club, in your opinion, to the school and to the community?

In order to get a well rounded list of high schools to send the questionnaire to, I selected fifty schools situated in every section of the state. To make my survey more representative I chose some city high schools, some country high schools, some which are accredited and some which are not. This list may, of course, leave out some places which are doing great things in dramatics (and some which are not), but as a whole it is offered as a representative group. The high schools to which the questionnaire were as follows:

Accomac
Alexandria
Apple Grove
Ashland
Bedford
Big Stone Gap
Blackstone
Bridgewater
Bristol
Buchanan
Buena Vista
Cape Charles

Front Royal
Gordonsville
Harrisonburg
Janett
Lexington
Luray
Lynchburg
McGaheysville
Manassas
Martinsville
Newport News
Norfolk

¹Plays for Classroom Interpretation, by Edwin Knickerbocker. Holt.

²The School Play, by Margaret C. Knapp. The English Leaflet, Vol. XXI No. 182. Dec., 1921. New England Association of Teachers of English, Boston, Mass.

Charlottesville	Petersburg
Claremant	Portsmouth
Clifton Forge	Pulaski
Columbia	Richmond (Jno. Mar.)
Covington	Richmond (Wm. Fox)
Crewe	Roanoke
Culpeper	Salem
Danville	Smithfield
Dayton	Staunton
Fairfield	Warrenton
Farmville	Waynesboro
Franklin	West Point
Fredericksburg	Wytheville

I received answers from thirty-one questionnaires of the fifty which I sent out. Upon these answers my report is based. All the large city schools replied and a well distributed number of small high schools.

Replies to the questionnaire disclose great variety in the plays which are being given. Choosing the play is one of the most important decisions the coach must make. Of course one wants a play which will please the audience, but even more important considerations, it seems to me, are authorship by a good playwright and suitability of parts to pupil actors. And even among good plays, it has been pointed out, there are pitfalls: "plays so artistic that they are merely bizarre; . . . others so realistic that they are stupidly vulgar."³ It is the coach's problem to strike a happy medium.

In choosing a play of literary value, the argument may be that it is too "high-brow", or that the royalty is too great, or that it is too hard for the pupils to present. A good play is always good. The lines are well written and clever, and they will stand through generations as something worth while. A purely commercial play "draws a crowd", and a large part of that crowd is there because the rest of the crowd is there. Is not the high school play the starting point to begin enlightening and at the same time entertaining the public with good plays?

The question of royalty comes up. It may be five or ten dollars, but every good thing has to be paid for. The author of the play has to make a living and it is made partly through the royalties he receives. Decide to give a good play; consider the royalty as one of the expenses; there will be money enough to pay it.

A good play improves each time it is rehearsed, and the more thought and study put on it, the more real value is received. A poor

play can not be good even with good actors. It lacks the personality of a good writer.

A great many people prefer the long play rather than the one-act play. The long play is perhaps a little difficult for the pupil to work with, and requires more work. The one-act play is the play for the high school pupil. There are so many good one-act plays available today and they are most fascinating. They require only a few characters, and the scenery is very simple. An evening of two or three one-act plays makes a well rounded program and a very delightful one.

From the answers to the questionnaire, I made the following table which gives the names of the schools and the plays given in the last three years:

Accomac:	Down By The Sea Much Ado About Bettie
Apple Grove:	Deacon Dublis Darktown Thirteen Club In Dixie Land When Smith Stepped Out Kentucky Belle America In Pilgrim Days Mr. Tubbs of Shantytown Always In Trouble
Bedford:	And Home Came Ted The Hoodo
Big Stone Gap:	Uncle Josh Mr. Bob Nothing But the Truth Negro Minstrel
Blackstone:	No Plays
Buchanan:	No Plays
Bristol:	Commencement Days Kentucky Belle Pattie Makes Things Hum A Bunch of Fun Pauvre Sylvia
Charlottesville:	Green Stockings A. E. Mason The Romancers Rostand The Mollusc Davies Alice Sit By the Fire Barrie Mrs. Dot Mangham
Clifton Forge:	No Plays
Danville:	Katcha-Koo The Importance of Being Earnest Oscar Wilde A Strenuous Life
Dayton:	Safety First Borrowed Money Putting It Up to Pattie

³Ibid.

Farmville:	Health Play	Smithfield:	Miss Cherryblossom The Gypsy Rover
Fredericksburg:	A Roman School A Roman Wedding Next Door Box and Cox The Adventures of Grandpa Le Courte de Flandres La Danseuse de Jean	Warrenton:	Kentucky Belle When Clarence Decides Importance of being Earnest Wilde
Harrisonburg:	When a Fellow Needs a Friend The Wishing Ring And Home Came Ted	Wytheville:	Mary's Millions
Lexington:	No plays by pupils		
Lynchburg:	Sherwood Noyes		
Manassas:	Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch		
McGaheysville:	Claim Aloud The Daughter of the Desert The Arrival of Kitty Dust of the Earth When a Fellow Needs a Friend		
Newport News:	Midsummer Nights Dream Shakespeare She Stoops to Conquer Goldsmith Merchant of Venice Shakespeare The Bourgeois Gentleman Moliere		
Norfolk	Green Stockings Mason Peg O' My Heart Manners The Private Secretary The Importance of Being Earnest Wilde Captain Letterblair		
Petersburg:	She Stoops to Conquer Goldsmith Pomander Walk Louis N. Parker Four class plays		
Portsmouth:	Green Stockings Mason The Feast of Little Lanterns The Importance of Being Earnest Oscar Wilde The Adventure of Lady Ursula Anthony Hope		
Roanoke:	Green Stockings Mason The Importance of Being Earnest Wilde Miss Somebody Else The Girls of Glen Willow The Sniggles Family		
Richmond	Green Stockings Mason Bulbul To Have and To Hold		
Salem:	Four plays. No name given		

From the list of plays above it will be noticed that some of the plays are well known and very familiar to us, while a large per cent of them are commercial plays. The most popular plays are "Green Stockings", by A. E. Mason; and "The Importance of Being Earnest", by Oscar Wilde. These are good plays. In a number of instances, plays are musical comedies. These may well be given by the glee club rather than the dramatic organization, or by a combination of the two, as the music is the important feature in the musical comedy.

Too often the coaching of the play falls to the lot of the English teacher, principal, or some other teacher, whether he has had any training and is interested in dramatics or not. The person who coaches the play should be one who has had training and who has a keen interest in dramatics.

Out of the thirty-one schools from which I had answers, in ten cases the principal coaches, and in twenty-two cases the English teacher is coach. Sometimes it is found that the English teacher and principal working together coach the plays. In one school, the coaching is done by the expression teacher. In five of the schools a dramatic coach is engaged to come a few days before the play is to be given and "touch the play up". (This is a good idea, provided the coach is interested and is not a tenth-rate actor out of a job.)

We find that some of the persons coaching the plays have had no experience; others have had as much as fifteen years in this work.

The admission fee ranges from fifteen cents to one dollar. Those schools charging as much as a dollar are the large city schools which have to rent a theatre for the performance, and naturally the price of admission must be more. The funds from the plays in practically every case are used for athletics. In some places the money goes to the school library, commencement expenses, school annual, glee club, or school furnishings. Newport News is the only place in which the proceeds are used for the dramatic work of the school.

only. This should be true in every school which has a dramatic club and it would be fine if, in the schools which do not have a club, the money made on a play could go to help organize a dramatic club. The dramatic club makes the money and should use it to build up a library of plays and dramatic literature. The club should subscribe to some theatrical magazine so that it may keep in touch with what is being done in the field. There are dramatic clubs in Charlottesville, Norfolk, Newport News, Portsmouth, Roanoke, and Smithfield and it is evident that some of the best work is being done at these places. No doubt it is due to the fact that they have an organization. I would like to see a good dramatic club organization in every high school in the state, because of its value to the pupil and the school. The Charlottesville high school considers that the dramatic club has a wider influence in the community than any other school organization, and that it has been a great stimulus in literary and artistic interests among the pupils. Many other schools find it a great benefit to the school and community.

Before dramatics in high schools can progress more rapidly, it must demonstrate its great value to the pupil. This must be evident to the teacher, the principal, and the community. In some schools a dramatic course is offered as an elective. We may hope to see the time when a dramatic course will be in all high schools, where appreciation and interpretation will be taught, "required" books be discussed, and where plots are talked of and plays written. Until dramatics has a place in the course of study in the high schools, we must have the best that can be gotten through clubs and plays given by the schools. I would like to emphasize again that plays should be given for the love of the work and the value received by the pupils, and not for the amount of money which can be made.

All over the United States and in a few cities in Virginia, we find Little Theatres entertaining hundreds of people. These Little Theatres are a benefit to the high schools in that they work indirectly with them because they interest the pupils in dramatic productions and give them the best at all times. As far as I know, there are Little Theatres in Richmond, Lynchburg, and Lexington. In 1911 there were only three Little Theatres in the United States and at the present time

we lead the world in the number of Little Theatres. "The Little Theatre is a place where unusual non-commercial plays are given; where the repertory and subscription system prevails; where scenic experimentation is rife; where 'How Much Can We Make?' is not the dominating factor. Little Theatres are established from love of drama, not from love of gain."⁴

I have listed fifty plays here which are taken from suggested lists⁵ found in my study of this subject. Each of these plays appears at least in two of the lists, and over half of them appear in three of the lists. These plays have also been given in high schools all over the country and have proved successful for high school pupils. These plays are submitted as of the type which the high schools of Virginia may wisely offer.

Admirable Crichton, The, J. M. Barrie
Affected Young Ladies, The, Moliere
Alice Sit By The Fire, J. M. Barrie
America Passes By, Kenneth Andrews
As You Like It, Shakespeare
Barbara's Wedding, J. M. Barrie
Bue Bird, The, Maurice Maeterlink
Comedy of Errors, The, Shakespeare
David Garrick, T. W. Robertson
Doctor in Spite of Himself, The, Moliere
Fame and the Poet, Lord Dunsany
Fannie and the Servant Problem, Jerome K.

Jerome

Green Stockings, Mason
Hour Glass, The, W. B. Yeates
Land of Heart's Desire, The, W. B. Yeats
Lost Silk Hat, The, Lord Dunsany
Man From Home, The, Booth Tarkington
Merchant Gentleman, The, Moliere

⁴The Little Theatre In The United States, by Constance D'Arcy Mackay. Holt.

⁵Suggestions for the High School Play, by Thakcer H. Guild. *The English Journal*. Vol. 2, 637-646.

Better High School Plays, by Gladys Tibbets, *The English Journal*, Vol. 7, 98-107.

Two Weeks' Intensive Study of the Drama with High School Seniors, by Margaret M. Skinner. *The English Journal*, Vol. 10, 268-273.

The Play Course in High Schools, by Frank Tompkins, *The English Journal*, Vol. 9, 530-533.

Producing in the Little Theatres, by Clarence Stratton. Appendix, page 227. Holt and Co., N. Y.

Plays for the Time, by Alev M. Drummond. *The English Journal*, Vol. 8, 410-428. Vol. 8, 623-626.

The School Play, by Margaret C. Knapp. *The English Leaflet*, Vol 21, No. 182.

Dramatics in the High School, Harry Andrews, *The English Journal*, Vol. 10, 465-468.

- Merry Wives of Windsor, The, Shakespeare
 Mice and Men, M. K. Ryley
 Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare
 Miss Civilization, Richard H. Davis
 Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare
 Nathan Hale, Clyde Fitch
 Neighbors, Zona Gale
 Nevertheless, Stuart Walker
 'Op O Me Thumb, Payce and Fens
 Passing of Third Floor Back, The, Jerome
 K. Jerome
 Peg O' My Heart, Hartley Manners
 Piper, The, Josephine Peabody
 Pot of Broth, The, W. B. Yeates
 Professor's Love Story, The, J. M. Barrie
 Quality Street, J. M. Barrie
 Riders to the Sea, J. M. Synge
 Rising of the Moon, The, Lady Gregory
 Rivals, The, Sheridan
 Romancers, The, Edmund Rostand
 Rosalind, J. M. Barrie
 School for Scandal, The, Sheridan
 Scrap of Paper, A, Sardou
 Sherwood, Alfred Noyse
 She Stoops to Conquer, Goldsmith
 Silver Box, The, John Galsworthy
 Six Who Pass While the Tentils Boil, Stuart
 Walker
 Spreading the News, Lady Gregory
 Taming of the Shrew, The, Shakespeare
 Three Pills in a Bottle, Rachell Field
 Trifles, Frank Shay
 Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
 Twig of Thorn, A, Mary J. Warren

There are several new books of one-act plays which should be of interest to the high school coach and also to the pupils. They are listed as follows:

1. One-Act Plays by Modern Authors, by Helen Cohen. Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York.
2. Plays for Classroom Interpretation, by E. Van B. Knickerbocker. Holt, New York.
3. The Atlantic Book of Modern Plays, by S. A. Leonard. Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston.
4. Contemporary One-Act Plays, by B. Roland Lewis. Scribner, New York.
5. A Treasury of Plays For Women, by Frank Shay. Little, Brown & Co., Boston.
6. Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays, by Frank Shay and Pierre Loving. Stewart Kidd, Cincinnati.
7. One-Act Plays, by Webber and Webster. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

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If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.—Thomas Jefferson.

QUOTATION

FUNDAMENTALS IN EDUCATION

THE dismay of the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching at the discovery that the United States was spending about a billion dollars a year on public education in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty is superficially an occasion for mirth. The retort that most naturally occurs to mind is the flippant query: "Ain't it awful?" A billion dollars that might have gone for battle-ships or to increase the army, or for tobacco, or to increase the efficiency of the boot-legging industry, or to supply needed capital for the equipment of railways, has gone into teaching millions of children. Think of it! We have been living heedlessly, recklessly in this era of unparalleled educational extravagance. The average citizen has gone about his business without once "viewing with alarm" this evidence of our entrance upon an insidious downward course. If he had known that educational expenditures had risen seven hundred percent while national income had increased only a paltry five hundred percent, he might even, in his thoughtless way, have "pointed with pride" to his proof of interest in our public schools. Now he knows better.

The condition of affairs is made still more ominous by the fact that while the increase in attendance in the elementary schools has about kept pace with the growth of the population, the high school population has increased a thousand-fold. Children aren't leaving school to go into shops, offices, factories and farms at the age of twelve or fourteen anything like as much as they used to do. If this keeps on (and if immigration continues to be restricted) who is going to do the hard, rough and dirty work of this country? Already more and more youth are insisting that they want a college as well as a high school education. Well may we ask, "Where is this thing going to end?" And there is the interest of the tax-payer to consider; it is well known that the greater part of the taxes—direct taxes, that is to say—are paid by the better-to-do-members of the community, the responsible pillars of society, who have but few children anyway, and many of whom have private schools for the children where they pay tuition besides taxes. The larger part of